

Civil Restraining Order: Defendant Briefing / Outreach Program

The Dorchester Judicial Oversight Demonstration (JOD) Project civil restraining order defendant briefing/outreach program was developed by a subcommittee including representatives from the defense bar, the probation department, batterer intervention programs, and victim services. By combining facets of Probation Officer Paula Martin's (Wrentham District Court/MA) defendant briefing materials and ideas with Fernando Mederos' Men's Outreach Worker Prevention Model, the program was developed. We believe that it has been an extremely promising and exciting component of our project. A community-based agency has collaborated with the JOD project on this program.

The Massachusetts Prevention Center was ideally suited to carry out this program. It is a private, non-profit agency, which is sub-contracted by the Department of Public Health to train and support outreach workers in health centers and community based agencies. It has a

large community network and access to outreach workers from all of our local agencies and health centers. The MA Prevention Center, with the technical support of

Fernando Mederos and the Dorchester Probation Department, has been optimally positioned to carry out the mandates of our defendant briefing/outreach program.

This program has served multiple purposes. First and foremost, we firmly believe that it will enhance victim safety and established a clear measure of accountability for defendants of civil restraining order cases. We are convinced that, by giving defendants information about the format and content of restraining order hearings, they will consider the hearings to be fairer, more meaningful, and more concrete, and therefore will be more likely to accept and comply

with the judges' orders. Secondly, the defendant-briefing program is geared to educate defendants to the criminal justice, pro-fessional, social, and immigration consequences of violating a restraining order. It is also designed to defuse the defendants' anger and resentment, as well as assist defendants with immediate housing, substance abuse treatment needs, and human service referrals. There was a hundred percent support for this program from the governmental and non-governmental victim service providers in our JOD project. They have all agreed that this could be a key victim safety feature to our project. Thirdly, the outreach part of the program has served as a forum to raise the level of community awareness and education about domestic violence. It will be targeted specifically at men in the Dorchester/Mattapan/Roxbury community.

Finally, it is our hopes that this initiative will continue to demonstrate to community residents and leaders that the JOD project is committed to preventing and decreasing the level of domestic violence in the community in a positive, proactive manner.

